

*'When Violet Eyes are Smiling:
The Love Stories of Raymond Chandler'*

The love story and the detective story cannot exist, not only in the same book – one might also say the same culture. Modern outspokenness has utterly destroyed the romantic dream on which love feeds . . . There is nothing left to write about but death, and the detective story is a tragedy with a happy ending. (Chandler, 1949, quoted in Hiney, 1997: 76)

[A]n understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition. (Sedgwick, 1990/1994: 1)

‘. . . don’t scatter my ashes over the blue Pacific. I like the worms better. Did you know that worms are of both sexes and that any worm can love any other worm?’ (Chandler, 1939/1948: 184–5)

Philip Marlowe, the detective hero of Raymond Chandler’s hard-boiled American crime novels, has become almost synonymous with the concept of the tough guy. This seminal figure emerged initially from the pulp magazines of the 1920s, and has come in turn to symbolise a particular form of urban American masculinity. But to what extent does the iconic tough guy of legend actually resemble the hard men of Chandler’s fiction? In this chapter I want to consider not

only the definition of 'toughness', but also the question of what it serves to hide. For Chandler's fiction, like that of Christie, does not entirely conform to its reputation, and on closer examination his studies of urban America seem to resemble detective fiction only in so far as their subject matter is betrayal. These criminal fictions are, first and foremost, narratives of besieged masculinity and love corrupted that seek to explain the paradoxical vulnerability of men within patriarchal society. Arguably the best examples of this paradigm are provided by Chandler's first two novels, *The Big Sleep* (1939) and *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940). These novels, which form the substantial focus of this chapter, together comprise a dynamic engagement with both the formula of detection and the definition of American masculinity. *The Long Good-Bye* (1953), to which I turn in conclusion, is often cited as Chandler's 'mature' postwar masterpiece, yet ultimately it reduplicates rather than develops the paradigms established by the earlier fiction, acting as a long drawn out and painful reiteration of a familiar set of anxieties. These anxieties, which haunt Marlowe throughout his career, are fundamentally focused around desire, and remorselessly reveal the detective as tough guy to be far more defenceless and exposed than his effete classical counterpart.

So what does it mean to be a tough guy in the fiction of Raymond Chandler? In his analysis of 'language as power' in American detective fiction Scott Christianson argues that the tough guy attempts to make sense of a chaotic and fragmented world through the assertion of linguistic control over his environment. He attempts to 'dominate the world, or come to terms with it, by defining it through tough talk, wisecracks, and evocative hard-boiled conceits' (1989: 159). And there can be no doubting the power of Chandler's conceits. The opening of *The Big Sleep* provides a typically complex example of his prose, while also introducing the leitmotif of patriarchal power. In countless ways Chandler's novels work and rework the figure of the powerful and wealthy father betrayed by the 'feminine' – whether that be in the form of wayward daughters, errant wives, or even his own uncontrollable body. This ambiguous figure is seldom central to the action, which is rather situated among the 'middle management' of masculinity – the aspirational would-be inheritors of patriarchal power, who still have everything to lose or gain within a competitive and corrupting symbolic order. The father is instead a character of Chandler's beginnings and endings, the unseen power who must, paradoxically, be both defended and

defied. *The Big Sleep* thus opens not with scene-setting, or with a substantial description of Philip Marlowe, but with a series of striking juxtapositions that reveal the detective's relationship to this monstrous power.¹

Marlowe has been summoned to the home of General Sternwood, a paralysed patriarch whose descent into death has been halted only by his need to set his estate in order. Something of a King Lear figure, the General in Chandler's dystopian vision has been blessed with only two daughters, who unfortunately bear closer resemblance to Goneril and Regan than to the dutiful Cordelia. Marlowe's task will be to contain the threats generated by the instability of these wayward women. On his first visit to the Sternwood mansion, Marlowe finds the General sitting 'like a newborn spider' in the midst of a hellish jungle of hothouse orchids, sinister plants 'with nasty meaty leaves and stalks like the newly washed fingers of dead men' (1939/1948: 13). Marlowe is offered a drink, which the General proceeds to consume vicariously:

I sipped the drink. The old man licked his lips watching me, over and over again, drawing one lip slowly across the other with a funereal absorption, like an undertaker dry-washing his hands. (1939/1948: 15)

The descriptions of the General and his surroundings evoke contradictory images of vulnerability and power. The General himself is as dependent as a newborn baby, but he sits at the centre of a deadly web. The vampiric quality of the old man's gaze reminds us of the vestiges of patriarchal power that cling to his crumbling form despite its frailty – a frailty that is nonetheless emphasised by the ironic simile that follows. Sternwood's transitional status between the living and the dead is metaphorically figured in the image of the expectant undertaker. Tasting and acting by proxy, the old man becomes both corpse and priest, as he passes on to Marlowe the mantle of his parental authority.

This condensed metaphoricity evokes possibilities of meaning far in excess of its apparent brevity, and moves beyond the constraints of dialogic 'tough talking'. Yet this rich language of suggestion is as typical of Marlowe as his witticisms: tough talk is integral to the hard-boiled detective, but it is not all of him.² This returns us to the concept of toughness, and the extent to which Marlowe can actually be seen to live up to his own reputation. The question of 'what is

'toughness' can, on one level, be answered quite simply. Toughness acts as a synonym for and an index of masculinity. Within this context, tough talk might be seen as the act through which masculinity is constituted and reinforced. Tough talk asserts the boundaries of the masculine. But, in the same way that Chandler's hard-boiled conceits far exceed the simple inscription of male power, producing an intricately wrought excess of subtle signification, so the depiction of masculinity comes in Chandler's fiction to exceed the parameters of patriarchal prescription and, in so doing, destabilises the very norms which hard-boiled detection works so ostentatiously to enforce.

Chandler's writing pays detailed attention to the male body. Within the Marlowe novels, the inscription of masculinity is not solely discursive, rather it is always located in the corporeal. Although much of the textual substance is comprised of competitive tough talking between the detective and a succession of cops, criminals, hard men and gangsters, Marlowe actually has little respect for men who are constituted through tough talk alone – as is witnessed by his dismissal of the gambler 'Mendy' Menendez in *The Long Good-Bye*: 'You're not big, you're just loud' (1953/1959: 294). Size, substance, the body – these things matter in Marlowe's world – but, contrastingly, the materiality of the detective's being is most frequently emphasised through markers of vulnerability such as age, alcohol, violence and desire.

These four factors act repeatedly to remind the detective of the limits of his discursive construction. They create a tension between the detective as a verbal icon, and the detective as a middle-aged, battered and hungover man, drawn by desire into yet another disastrous liaison. Thus it is that masculinity within Chandler's fiction emerges from a tension between exteriority and interiority, between the verbal projection of a coherent self and the bodily knowledge of a chaotic, fragmented subjectivity. In *Male Matters*, his acute analysis of masculine anxiety, Calvin Thomas describes men's fear of an embodiment which has always already been displaced on to the feminine. He argues that masculinity's self-assertion is based upon the repression of its corporeal dimension, and the refusal to acknowledge 'the role of the body in the production of thought, speech and writing' (1996: 13). But, although masculinity might claim such a pristine origin, in fact it is faced with a constant struggle to evade the traces of the body:

Masculinity cannot represent its supposedly immaculate self-construction without giving itself over to discursive productions in which the always potentially messy question of the body cannot fail to emerge. (Thomas, 1996: 13)

That Philip Marlowe aspires to the dream of 'immaculate self-construction' is evident from his extreme biographical reticence. The series of novels repeats rather than develops our knowledge of the detective, whose being is marked both by the absence of a past and an extremely limited acquaintance. Even at his most expansive, Philip Marlowe keeps his history a secret:

I'm a licensed private investigator and have been for quite a while. I'm a lone wolf, unmarried, getting middle-aged, and not rich. I've been in jail more than once and I don't do divorce business. I like liquor and women and chess and a few other things. The cops don't like me too well, but I know a couple I get along with. I'm a native son, born in Santa Rosa, both parents dead, no brothers or sisters, and when I get knocked off in a dark alley some time . . . nobody will feel that the bottom has dropped out of his or her life. (Chandler, 1953/1959: 79)

Marlowe's masculinity thus stands in splendid isolation, and is regularly reconstituted through tough talk or an equally tough refusal of talk. In each novel he asserts his identity through the verbal combat of aggression or wit; depending on the opposition, or through a stubborn withholding of knowledge. However, the detective also asserts his masculinity through the protection of the weak, both male and female, and through a sentimental, paternalistic romanticism that stands in stark contrast to the isolated existentialism of the tough-guy persona.

In his biography of Chandler, Tom Hiney attributes something of Marlowe's duality to Chandler's own surprisingly delicate sensibilities. Hiney reports that Chandler experienced considerable difficulties in adapting James Cain's *Double Indemnity* for Hollywood consumption. Already struggling against the confines of the notorious Production Code, Chandler's task was further complicated by his own resistance to sexually explicit narrative:³

Synthetic stallions like James Cain have made a fetish of pure orgasms, which the middle classes seem to regard as a semi-

respectable adjunct to raising a family. The literary glorification of lust leads to emotional impotence, because the love story has little or nothing to do with lust. (Quoted in Hiney, 1997: 142)

Chandler's hostility draws attention to something that has long been acknowledged as an integral part of his own writing, namely the extent to which a chivalric conception of romance co-exists with the depiction of violence, cynicism and urban malaise (Knight, 1980: 137-8; Cawelti, 1976: 177-82). It is a pertinent reminder that, unlike later 'hard-boiled' writers such as Mickey Spillane, Chandler tried at some level to resist the automatic linkage between sex and violence. Indeed, in spite of a considerable quantity of very erotic description, his novels are remarkable for containing hardly any sex at all. What sex there is takes place off stage, suggesting that Chandler is more concerned with the process of desire than with its consummation – particularly in the case of the detective himself.⁴ Yet despite the absence of heterosexual sex, Marlowe's world is redolent with the erotic. From where does this mystique emerge? Can tough guys fall in love – and if they can, who or what might form a legitimate object of their romantic desires?

It is difficult to build a case for Chandler's female characters as objects of desire. Although outwardly attractive, they inwardly disappoint on the grounds of either psychosis or neurosis. Chandler is a skilled deployer of both the *femme fatale* and the deadly innocent, but the depiction of these women is devoid of sensuality. Rather, these representations of the feminine are harsh and unforgiving, delineating a female sexuality that is perceived as threatening even as it attracts. The female characters of *The Big Sleep* provide a typical illustration. We might perhaps expect the opening description of Carmen Sternwood, nymphomaniac and murderer, to be less than flattering:

Her eyes were slate-grey, and had almost no expression when they looked at me. She came over near me and smiled with her mouth and she had little sharp predatory teeth, as white as fresh orange pith and as shiny as porcelain. They glistened between her thin too taut lips. Her face lacked colour and didn't look too healthy. (Chandler, 1939/1948: 10)

And indeed, before long Carmen has revealed a tendency to hiss, a face like 'scraped bone' (1939/1948: 153) and a laugh that reminds

Marlowe of 'rats behind the wainscoting' (68, 151). More surprisingly, however, the other women of the novel fare little better. Although initial descriptions of both 'Blonde Agnes' and Carmen's sister, Vivien Regan, offer the promise of uncomplicated sensuality, on closer acquaintance they turn out to be not far removed from the psychotic Carmen. Before many chapters have passed, Agnes is biting the ankles of the detective and letting out a 'low animal wail' (1939/1948: 87, 93), while Vivien's response to Marlowe's cold shoulder is to tear a handkerchief to shreds with her teeth (1939/1948: 148). Women's position on the perpetual verge of a nervous breakdown makes them an unsuitable site of erotic interest within the text. But if the detective's 'legitimate' heterosexual desire is so seldom either fulfilled or ratified, how and on to what is desire displaced?

The answer returns us to masculinity. Sensuality within Chandler's fiction resides predominantly in the depiction of men. Within these fictions so marked by the absence of satisfaction, the location of the erotic is displaced from its usual locus, the objectified female body, on to the less familiar corporeality of the male. This potentially transgressive strategy of evoking the homoerotic is, however, at least in part deployed as a defence mechanism. By focusing on a taboo – a forbidden object – the impossibility of the consummation of desire is redoubled, and the lack that drives both the narratives of detection and romance is given renewed impetus in the hopelessness of its quest. Georges Bataille suggests that the aim of the erotic is to 'substitute for their persistent discontinuity a miraculous continuity between two beings'; but, he goes on, 'this continuity is chiefly to be felt in the anguish of desire, when it is still inaccessible, still an impotent, quivering yearning' (1962/1987: 19). Chandler's tough guys, in their persistent quest for answers and connections, are defined by their awareness of lack. They show some understanding of the provisional and precarious nature of their existence. This glimmer of comprehension of the 'human condition' is not manifested by those who are only pretenders to the mantle of toughness, characters who attempt to assert their triumph over lack in an excess of empty talk. Marlowe, in his isolation, is haunted by the bodies that surround him, bodies that he knows he cannot possess, but which he seeks, in masculine self-defence (or self-assertion), to explain and contain.

However, the apparent object of his investigations is seldom what actually drives his search. In *The Big Sleep*, for example, Marlowe is

ostensibly hired to neutralise the threat posed to Carmen Sternwood by the blackmailing Arthur Gwynn Geiger. However, the subtext of his employment, never officially acknowledged by General Sternwood or by Marlowe, is the search for the missing 'big man', Rusty Regan. Regan is a romantic figure, 'a curly-headed Irishman from Clonmel, with sad eyes and a smile as wide as Wilshire Boulevard', and the General describes him as 'the breath of life to me' (1939/1948: 16). As part of his duty to the metaphorical 'big man' that is the dying patriarch, Marlowe pursues the romantic icon of the literal big man. By the end of the novel this quest has come to dominate the narrative, and the women he was hired to protect are revealed as perpetrators rather than victims of the narrative's criminality.⁵

However, to define the object of the detective's desire as masculine might in itself be seen as a contentious issue. Tom Hiney, for example, acknowledges the critical speculation as to whether Chandler's fiction reveals a 'latent homosexuality', but chooses to take a fairly circumspect approach to the subject. Hiney argues that suggestions of homosexuality 'pointedly failed to make allowances for the genre within which Chandler wrote', concluding that:

Like westerns, hard-boiled detective stories had always held up strong, handsome and honest men for heroes. That these men were invariably bachelors, and invariably got on best with other bachelors, was a part of the tough genre. (Hiney, 1997: 246)

This strikes me as a fascinating argument. It is not Chandler's fiction, nor his hero, that might be read as homoerotic, but the whole genre within which he was working. Hiney's otherwise informative biography thus evades the issue of same-sex desire within Chandler's fiction, perhaps on account of the singular lack of evidence to suggest any homosexual *activity* on the part of the *writer*. However, as Judith Butler pertinently observes, 'there are structures of psychic homosexuality within heterosexual relations, and structures of psychic heterosexuality within gay and lesbian sexuality and relationships' (1990: 121).⁶ The evidence or otherwise of Chandler's life cannot detract from the homoeroticism that characterises his fiction, and the implications of this investment in the homosocial deserves to be considered.⁷

In his essay 'The Simple Art of Murder', Chandler sets out probably his most famous definition of the hard-boiled hero:

[D]own these mean streets a man must go who is not himself' mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. (Chandler, 1950/1964: 198)

Quite a prescription – and one usually assumed to apply to Philip Marlowe. But does it? Or rather, to what extent is it appropriate? Marlowe is a flawed hero, something he would be the first to admit. In *Farewell, My Lovely*, for example, although his visit to the dissolute and distinctly unlovely Jessie Florian leaves him feeling disgusted both with her and himself, his ethical revulsion is not sufficient to effect a change of strategy:

A lovely old woman. I liked being with her. I liked getting her drunk for my own sordid purposes. I was a swell guy. I enjoyed being me. You find almost anything under your hand in my business, but I was beginning to be a little sick at my stomach. (Chandler, 1940/1949: 33)

Yet for all his awareness of the corruption and decay that surrounds him, he is not a man much given to personal introspection. When he feels despair, he does not even tell his usual confidant, the reader. *The Lady in the Lake* provides a typical example of Marlowe's alienation. Frustrated and humiliated, he can only describe himself from without:

I looked at my watch. I looked at the wall. I looked at nothing. I put the liquor bottle away and went over to the washbowl to rinse the glass out. When I had done that I washed my hands and bathed my face in cold water and looked at it . . . The face under the hair had a sick look. I didn't like the face at all. (Chandler, 1944/1952: 140)

Marlowe is a man of actions and reactions, and his honour emerges not from a clearly defined code of practice, but rather from instinct. As Chandler puts it, his honour is inevitable, but it is also 'without

thought'. Marlowe does not define himself as the 'one good man' of hard-boiled legend, and neither should we, as critics, confine Chandler's description of the ideal to the figure of Marlowe. I want, thus, to suggest a shift, and argue that Marlowe is not the 'one good man', but is instead in search of that man. He is looking for and desires this good man, both as an ideal to set in the balance against the void of corruption and despair, and as a lover with whom he might form an idealised homosocial union, located not in the tarnished present, but in another pre-symbolic arena. He seeks exactly that which is prohibited by the laws of masculine self-fashioning: the excess of the body, or what might be seen in Kristevan terms as a 'semiotic' space outside the confines of institutionalised heterosexuality.⁸

Marlowe's tough talk creates a verbal symbolic self that asserts the accepted form of patriarchal masculinity while obliterating all others, including its own vulnerable body. This self-inscription, like the symbolic order of which it is a part, rests upon the unstable and irrepressible foundations of the semiotic: it is, in consequence, both self-creation and self-denial. In his quest for the big man he responds illicitly to the pre-verbal impulses of a 'semiotic masculinity', rooted in the body, and this desiring force, like the semiotic bodies of Agatha Christie's fiction, cannot be wholly contained by the 'text's rational logic' (Grosz, 1990b: 152). It is Judith Butler who offers perhaps the most useful insight into the pervasive melancholy of Marlowe's position:

To the extent that homosexual attachments remain unacknowledged within normative heterosexuality, they are not merely constituted as desires that emerge and subsequently become prohibited. Rather, these are desires that are proscribed from the start. And when they do emerge on the far side of the censor, they may well carry that mark of impossibility with them, performing, as it were, as the impossible within the possible. As such, they will not be attachments that can be openly grieved. (Butler, 1993: 236)

In his search for the lost ideal man, Marlowe pursues a desire that cannot be articulated in an attempt to compensate for a loss that can never be grieved.

Why, though, do I see the novels as idealising the homosocial at the expense of the heterosexual? Why can't Marlowe find the ideal he seeks in a 'nice' girl, like Anne Riordan? The novels offer little in the

way of explanation for the detective's refusal of nearly all offers, and the absence of heterosexual fulfilment is usually attributed by critics to the demands and limitations of the formula. However, Marlowe's desires are sufficiently complex to deserve closer attention. He seems detached, if not actively repulsed in the face of female sexuality. In a somewhat dutiful re-enactment of the Oedipal conflict, Marlowe is attracted to the many beautiful women who litter his path, but always accepts the father's prohibition. In both *The Big Sleep* and *Farewell, My Lovely*, Marlowe's erotic encounters are brought to an abrupt and premature closure by his refusal to transgress patriarchal law. 'Kissing is nice, but your father didn't hire me to sleep with you' (1939/1948: 147) comments Marlowe as he breaks the intimacy of his encounter with Vivien Regan. Similarly, in *Farewell, My Lovely*, the interruption of his embrace with Mrs Lewin Lockridge Grayle by her impotent and aged husband sends Marlowe scurrying back to a distant chair and leaves him feeling cold and uncomfortable: 'I felt nasty, as if I had picked a poor man's pocket' (1940/1949: 120). We are reminded emphatically that this is a patriarchal society in which women, no matter how powerful they might seem, ultimately all belong to somebody.

Moreover, the entire plot of *Farewell, My Lovely* can be seen as an extended exploration of the homosocial structures that facilitate men's ownership of women. Moose Malloy, who literally drags Marlowe into his story at the beginning of the novel, is hunting for 'Little Velma', the woman he left behind when he was sent to jail some eight years previously. Although Moose fairly swiftly disappears from view after committing the casual murder of a black bar-owner, Marlowe nonetheless feels drawn to him and his quest. He has, Marlowe thinks, some right to rediscover Velma, to exert his claim of ownership over her, irrespective of the passage of time. That Velma has since transformed herself into Mrs Grayle is neither here nor there as far as Marlowe is concerned: Moose has a prior claim on her as his ideal woman, the dream that kept him going throughout his years of incarceration.

However, as Marlowe's encounters with Vivien Regan and Mrs Grayle suggest, there is a distinct and significant refusal of risk evident in Marlowe's sexual encounters. This might be seen in Freudian terms as the ego's insecurity, its reluctance to face the inevitability and necessity of change and its fear of its own libidinal energy. In this context it is interesting to return to Chandler's comments on James Cain. Chandler's resistance to what he perceives

as Cain's fetishisation of orgasm might be seen as indicative of a different anxiety on the part of his own texts, namely a fear of the self-annihilation associated with orgasm. In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' Freud argues that '[t]he pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts'. In a curious paradox of self-preservation, he finds it to be constantly 'on guard against increases of stimulation from within, which would make the task of living more difficult' (Freud, 1920/1955: 63). Freud's conclusion forms a singularly apt description for the sexual self-control that characterises Philip Marlowe. Yet for all his self-containment, Marlowe cannot evade the imperatives of desire, and these repressed impulses return in displaced form. In his 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', Freud suggests the term fetishism to describe the substitution of the 'normal sexual object' by 'another which bears some relation to it, but is entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim' (Freud, 1905/1953: 153):

What is substituted for the sexual object is some part of the body (such as the foot or hair) which is in general very inappropriate for sexual purposes, or some inanimate object which bears an assignable relation to the person whom it replaces and preferably to that person's sexuality (e.g. a piece of clothing or underlinen). (Freud, 1905/1953: 153)

Continuing his definition, Freud hypothesises that an element of fetishism is characteristic of all love relations. However, in pathological circumstances it is possible that the longing for the fetish may replace the 'normal aim', and indeed, even become the 'sole sexual object' (Freud's emphasis, 1905/1953: 154). Without wishing to pathologise Marlowe, it is nonetheless possible to suggest that Chandler's novels are built upon a series of interlocking fetishistic depictions of the male body. *Farewell, My Lovely* acts as a prime example of a paradigm replicated throughout the Marlowe novels whereby individual male body parts act as fetishes for the sexual object, which might be seen as the male body in its entirety. In a structure reminiscent of the Chinese box, or Russian doll, these 'micro'-fetishistic observations exist within a larger 'macro'-fetishistic landscape in which the body of the man, particularly but not exclusively the 'big' man, operates as a fetish for an idealised masculinity which is, ultimately, the impossible object of the detective's desire. Marlowe thus gives intense scrutiny to the specific in the

hope that it will lead to the general. Confronting what might be his nemesis in the person of Jules Amthor, Psychic Consultant, Marlowe is struck more by the beauty of Amthor's hands than by the peril of his own situation. Amthor is beautiful:

He had the palest finest white hair I ever saw. It could have been strained through silk gauze. His skin was as fresh as a rose petal. He might have been thirty-five or sixty-five. He was ageless. His hair was brushed straight back from as good a profile as Barrymore ever had. (Chandler, 1940/1949: 130–1)

However, he cannot ultimately satisfy Marlowe's questing gaze, as his criminality is too 'white collar', too cold and calculating. It cannot appeal to a detective who forgives, and forgets only the brutal unpremeditated violence of semiotic masculinity. Consequently, as Marlowe's description continues, Amthor undergoes a fantastical transformation from Jekyll into Hyde, a transformation conceived in the terms of a mythical, legendary atemporality:

His eyes were deep, far too deep. They were the depthless drugged eyes of the somnambulist. They were like a well I read about once. It was nine hundred years old, in an old castle. You could drop a stone into it and wait. You could listen and wait and then you could give up waiting and laugh and then just as you were ready to turn away a faint, minute splash would come back up to you from the bottom of that well, so tiny, so remote that you could hardly believe a well like that possible.

His eyes were deep like that. And they were also eyes without expression, without soul, eyes that could watch lions tear a man to pieces and never change, that could watch a man impaled and screaming in the hot sun with his eyelids cut off. (1940/1949: 131)

Amthor metamorphoses into a monster, a traditional trial for the questing hero. The mythic quality of Amthor's villainy reminds us that Marlowe is this questing knight in search of an ideal, and in *Farewell, My Lovely* that ideal demands to be read in terms of homosocial, if not of homosexual, desire.⁹

It is important to note that what is at stake, what is possible and what is gained in Marlowe's homosocial bonding and homoerotic encounters cannot be directly equated with his heterosexual encoun-

ters. It requires a different set of critical and analytic paradigms to articulate and interpret these textual impulses. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued that the end of the nineteenth century can be seen as a period increasingly embroiled in the construction of polarised binary categories of identity, a process of 'sexual specification or species-formation' (1990/1994: 9). This new development, she argues, 'left no space in the culture exempt from the potent incoherences of homo/heterosexual definition' (1990/1994: 2). The interpretation of Chandler's work has largely existed within this paradigm, and it is this polarising critical tendency, this insistence on either/or which has made it so difficult to read the fluid, polyvalent sexual signifiers of his fiction. To restore the complexity and ambiguity that mark the bodies of Chandler's fiction, this binarism must be deconstructed.

I want, though, to begin this process by focusing on the most fundamental binarism, that is, the constitutive division between self and other. From the moment that the child is cut off from the ideal imaginary unity of the pre-symbolic dyad, the subject's existence is predicated upon an acknowledgement of loss. For Freud this critical moment is located in the Oedipal crisis, when the law of the father asserts its authority and shatters the child's conception of its symbiotic union with the mother. For Lacan the crisis is located in the mirror stage, where the child makes a crucial misrecognition. Mistaking its image for itself, it believes itself to be complete and unified, when it remains in reality a mass of uncontrollable drives and desires. The gap between the ideal and the real torments the subject, underpinning the impossible desires of adult life. However, for the hard-boiled detective, perhaps the most telling formulation of the subject's precarious status comes from Georges Bataille:

Each being is distinct from all others. His birth, his death, the events of his life may have an interest for others, but he alone is directly concerned in them. He is born alone. He dies alone. Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity . . . We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. (Bataille, 1962/1987: 12, 15)¹⁰

The tension between self and other is the axis of eroticism and, Bataille argues, the 'whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-

contained character of the participants as they are in their normal lives' (1962/1987: 17). Here is the risk that so troubles Philip Marlowe. To succumb to the lure of the erotic as embodied by the women he encounters would be to jeopardise the security of his ego. However, within this formulation, Marlowe's fetishisation of the masculine reveals a curious strategy for surviving the threats of a hostile symbolic environment. Marlowe's fascination with the 'big man' can be seen to embody a shift from the threatening opposition between self and other to the security, albeit illusory, of a division between self and *more self*. By shifting the locus of his desire away from the other that is woman, Marlowe seeks security. His desire is for the big man who is both him and not him, the other for whom desire is felt, and yet also the familiar self reflected back in the mirror. While Lacan would assure us of the misplaced nature of Marlowe's trust, within the framework of the narrative, Marlowe's desires manage to navigate a path that successfully evades both the 'little death' of orgasm and the greater death that threatens him as part of his everyday life.

In this movement away from the 'other', Marlowe seeks to replicate the ideal symbiosis of the mother/child dyad – a not unfamiliar textual strategy of the 1930s and 1940s. In British crime fiction the yearning for the pre-Oedipal security symbolised by marriage or home can be seen to emerge from the threat and pressures of the Second World War,¹¹ but for Marlowe, this urge to retreat emerges from the ongoing hostility and corruption of the hard-boiled urban environment. However, having invested so much in both his own and others' masculinity, the ideal of Marlowe's symbiotic union could only ever be a man – but a man, as the conclusion of *Farewell, My Lovely* will show, whose masculinity is figured less in terms of toughness or aggression than of nurturance. The self-created masculinity of tough talk thus disguises a yearning for the fantasmic security of a pre-symbolic, corporeal origin, more usually associated with the maternal.

Chandler's focus on a semiotic masculinity that is in excess, outside the constraints of linear temporality, and which cannot be contained by the laws of patriarchal society, has the effect of destabilising the binary categories of sex and gender. His writing, which at one level seems only to replicate reductive gender stereotypes, can on another level be seen to undermine the foundational assumption that gender follows automatically upon the unchanging template of sex. In the words of Judith Butler:

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way . . . The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. (Butler, 1990: 6)

Butler's hypothesis is singularly appropriate for the world of Chandler's fiction where both men and women occupy the full spectrum of gendered positions from delicate femininity to brutal masculinity. Chandler's fiction is also, however, riven with paradoxes. He is capable both of crude biological determinism and of more sophisticated constructions. At the same time as suggesting that sex and gender should not automatically be equated, Chandler is also concerned to revalorise the categories of masculinity and femininity, shifting these terms out of their customary cultural contexts, and establishing his own hierarchy of ethical and physical worth.

Thus, women – in Chandler's world – do not belong in the semiotic, but in the symbolic. They conform to the pattern of a long history of American literature that has cited the domestic as a place of confinement and restraint, a space that threatens to contain and emasculate the free-flowing libidinal energies of American masculinity.¹² As Tony Hilfer has observed, the misogyny of the crime genre is 'a specialized version of the central myth of the American romance: the hero's protection of his personal identity by flight from the entangling alliances of social definition' (Hilfer, 1990: 54–5). In the urban modernity of Chandler's world, women are still expected to inhabit a domestic space, yet their desires are encoded as patterns of order and symbolic stability against which the more 'semiotic' model of masculinity is set. Deviant women, or non-conforming and dangerous women, may also exhibit semiotic tendencies: if they are situated outside the law they frequently display the symptoms of 'semiotic masculinity'. The sexually voracious Crystal Kingsley in *The Lady in the Lake* is a typical example. Not only do her kleptomaniac tendencies set her outside a series of laws her husband is anxious to respect (1944/1952: 14), but her financial independence leaves her free not to 'fuss with the little details like getting married'

(1944/1952: 45). Deviant women, such as the Sternwood girls and Mrs Grayle, are usually characterised by their independent wealth, their roving sexual appetites and the confident occupation of public spaces. They invade masculine space and can arguably be seen to be gendered as masculine. In Marlowe's eyes, however, they are still women, and as such pose a threat to his erotic security. In these terms, Marlowe's desire to save the neurotic Merle Davis in *The High Window* becomes perfectly comprehensible. She is defined by her dependency, constantly repeating a refrain that pays homage to the very woman who has exploited and abused her (1943/1951: 142, 167, 217). We see her only in interior spaces: the tomb-like Murdock house, Marlowe's sanctuary apartment (where she is allowed to inhabit the bed from which Carmen Sternwood was so unceremoniously removed) and, finally, the kitchen of her parents' house, where restored to symbolic femininity, she begins to recover from her neurosis. Her only foray into a public space turns out to be a farce, when she runs to Marlowe claiming to have murdered a corpse. This is a woman who has twice thought that she had taken action, only to be confronted with the reality of her passivity. Whenever she tries to act in her world, she faints. She wanted to kill both Bright and Vannier, but her body failed her, and the actual murders were committed by others more suited to the task. The biological determinism that stalks Merle Davis is one extreme of the complex spectrum of gender positioning that emerges from the Chandler oeuvre.

While gender representation within these novels might thus be seen to exhibit elements of Butler's 'free-floating artifice', Chandler's gender agenda is itself rather more rigidly focused. As his attribution of reward and punishment shows, it is ultimately a particular form of masculinity that is valorised: a masculinity which may be exhibited by women, but which finds its apotheosis in the iconic figure of the 'big man'.

I suggested earlier that Marlowe's quest might be read as the search for one good man, and it is in *Farewell, My Lovely* that this dynamic is most clearly delineated. Although ostensibly seeking the holy 'Grayle' that is Velma, Marlowe seems more strongly driven by a desire to re-encounter the magnificent masculine icon that is Moose Malloy:

His skin was pale and he needed a shave. He would always need a shave. He had curly black hair and heavy eyebrows that

almost met over his thick nose. His ears were small and neat for a man of that size and his eyes had a shine close to tears that grey eyes often seem to have. He stood like a statue, and after a long time he smiled. (Chandler, 1940/1949: 8)

The virility of Moose's constant need to shave, a traditional marker of masculinity, is undercut by the evocation of tears – an image that gives a vulnerability to Moose's otherwise monumental appearance. This vulnerability is significant. Moose may be a big man, but he is adrift in a world he scarcely recognises or understands. In *Farewell, My Lovely*, Marlowe's idealised 'big man' is constructed not as a 'tough guy' but as an outsider. Moose's masculinity is not synonymous with the patriarchal structures that form the symbolic order, and he can more readily be conceived as a manifestation of the semiotic. As Marlowe explains to the understandably nervous barman at Florian's, the seedy 'dine and dice emporium' where Moose begins his search for Velma:

'He's been away a long time,' I said. 'Eight years. He doesn't seem to realize how long that is, although I'd expect him to think it a lifetime. He thinks the people here should know where his girl is. Get the idea?' (1940/1949: 15)

Moose Malloy represents a form of 'pure' masculinity, outside time, and transgressing spatial boundaries. As Marlowe's early descriptions of a hand big enough to sit in and shoulders the width of a beer truck suggest, Moose is in excess of the symbolic constraints that surround him. His role in the narrative confirms this semiotic dimension. Moose enters the narrative as a semiotic irruption, a substantial return of the repressed, that wreaks havoc on the order around him. Marlowe, the 'innocent' bystander, is literally and metaphorically picked up by Moose, but, having been dragged into the big man's narrative, he seems unable to let the memory rest, and for the remainder of the novel tracks the traces of his presence across the symbolic respectability of LA. Moose frames the narrative of *Farewell, My Lovely*. He only fully emerges from underground at the beginning and the end of the novel, which is otherwise concerned with the opposite end of the social scale. While Marlowe hunts for Mrs Grayle's missing jade and ponders the mystery of Lindsay Marriot's murder, Moose's narrative returns underground, and the reader is only reminded of it by the violent traces of further

semiotic eruptions, such as the murder of Jessie Florian. That in the end the repressed 'underlying causality' of Moose's crude criminality should be intimately connected to the artificial gloss of a corrupt symbolic order is singularly appropriate to a narrative in which nothing and no one is quite as they seem.

It is nonetheless disturbing that Marlowe should be so attracted to a man whose first boundary-crossing transgression is the murder of a black bar-owner. As well as being presented as a man out of time, Moose is a character who does not know his own strength. He is like a child both in his single-minded demand for Velma, and in the frequency with which people, like toys, fall apart in his hands. Having crossed the racial boundary separating black from white by entering Florian's bar, Moose seems unable or unwilling to understand his transgression. His invasion is accomplished through a combination of physical force and the unthinking racial privilege that accompanies whiteness. Marlowe tries to break free of Moose's hold over him, and offers support to the terrorised barman. However, for all that Marlowe tries to put this particular big man out of his mind, it is Moose's parting words, 'You ain't forgetting me, pal', that prove prophetic (1940/1949: 16).

The novel, then, is haunted by the spectre of Moose, a beautiful monster in the Frankenstein mould, who only wants to be loved and cannot understand what the world has got against him. As the object of the detective hero's quest, he represents an ambivalent figure, and not one likely to satisfy Marlowe's cravings for one good man. However, it is not until the very end of the narrative that Marlowe stumbles upon a suitable object for his desires. Loitering with intent on the Bay City waterfront, Marlowe's eye is caught by a 'big red-headed roughneck in dirty sneakers and tarry pants and what was left of a torn blue sailor's jersey' (1940/1949: 212):

He smiled a slow tired smile. His voice was soft, dreamy, so delicate for a big man that it was startling. It made me think of another soft-voiced big man I had strangely liked. (1940/1949: 213)

The connection is obvious and, in Red Norgaard, Marlowe has finally encountered the masculine ideal for which he has been searching. The descriptions of Red are fascinating. Like Moose, he stands outside the corrupting influences of wealth and power – indeed, his honesty has lost him his job as a policeman in the otherwise

corrupt Bay City PD – and, like Moose, his size is tempered by 'feminine' characteristics:

I looked at him again. He had the eyes you never see, that you only read about. Violet eyes. Almost purple. Eyes like a girl, a lovely girl. His skin was as soft as silk. Lightly reddened, but it would never tan. It was too delicate . . . He was not as big as Moose Malloy, but he looked very fast on his feet. His hair was that shade of red that glints with gold. But except for the eyes he had a plain farmer face, with no stagy kind of handsomeness. (1940/1949: 214)¹³

This description is marked by symbols of wholesomeness and honesty. Unlike Amthor, whose good looks outshone even movie stars, Red's beauty is clearly distinguished from the artifice of stage and screen. Classical images of virginal female purity are here transferred to the idealised male, while the whole of his face is associated with the rugged outdoor virtues of the farmer, a description that immediately sets him apart from the novel's norm of urban vice.

Red's 'plain farmer face' also draws attention to the other dimension of his role as the ideal other. Marlowe has struggled through the novel, standing alone against violent assaults and personal betrayals, but in Red he finds not only someone he can trust, but also someone who will help and nurture him in times of crisis. When the hero's resolve is fading, it is Red who offers support and enters into the intimacy of a shared danger. Small wonder, then, that Marlowe should be so attracted to this man. And within the tough-guy framework of the genre, Marlowe's homoerotic intimacy can pass unnoticed. It is acceptable for him to idolise Red precisely because Red is such an edifice of the masculine. Although described as a beautiful girl, the qualities praised are not specific to social constructions of 'femininity', and Red can in no sense be seen as a 'feminised' man. Indeed, his butchness is highly significant, as it is only in its distance from the feminine that the homosocial's descent into the homoerotic is legitimised.

The cumulative effect of the depiction of femininity in Chandler's novels is suggestive of a considerable phobia, and one which extends beyond the chastity of Philip Marlowe. The corruption of blackmailer Lindsay Marriot is evident in the femininity of his surroundings and dress:

I was looking at a tall blond man in a white flannel suit with a violet satin scarf around his neck . . . I went in past him and smelled perfume . . . We went down three steps to the main part of the living-room. The carpet almost tickled my ankles . . . There was plenty of nice soft furniture, a great many floor cushions, some with golden tassels and some just naked . . . There was a wide damask covered divan in a shadowy corner, like a casting couch . . . It was a room where anything could happen except work. (Chandler, 1940/1949: 45–6)

Not even his heterosexuality can redeem Marriot's deplorable dandyism, while the description of his soft furnishings verges on the pornographic. In the naked cushions and casting-couch divan Chandler evokes a world of decadent sexuality underpinned not by mutual desire, but by exploitative marketplace economics. By contrast, the virtue of Marlowe's plucky 'boy' assistant, Anne Riordan, is evident in the masculinity of her surroundings. Crawling to the 'sanctuary' of Anne's apartment after escaping from the asylum, Marlowe is reassured to discover that '[t]here was nothing womanish in the room except a full length mirror' (1940/1949: 160). However, that it is ultimately femininity rather than homosexuality which offers the greatest threat to the symbolic order is perhaps most clearly illustrated by *The Big Sleep*. Examining the home of Arthur Gwynn Geiger – blackmailer, pornographer and queer – Marlowe stumbles, like Goldilocks, on to a number of differently signifying bedrooms. Geiger's is 'neat, fussy, womanish', evidence once again of the link between femininity and corruption (1939/1948: 42). That of his lover, by contrast, is described as a 'nice, clean, manly little room' (1939/1948: 99). Marlowe's preference, it is implied, is for the murderous but manly boy over the feminised, degenerate 'fag'.

Within a sufficiently masculine environment, then, it would seem that some degree of same-sex desire is legitimised, and what could be more masculine than danger?¹⁴ In a couple of chapters that can arguably be said to form the most erotic and sensual scenario of the novel, Red and Marlowe take to sea in an attempt to board the boat of crime boss Laird Brunnette (whose feminised name gives a clear indication of his dubious virtue):

There was just enough fog to make everything seem unreal. The wet air was as cold as the ashes of love.

Red leaned close to me and his breath tickled my ear. (1940/1949: 221-2)

The proximity of danger incites a confessional mood, with Marlowe admitting that he is 'scared stiff' (1940/1949: 214). The last vestiges of the tough façade break down, and Marlowe attempts to put a jokey frame around his unusual loquaciousness: 'I told him a great deal more than I intended to. It must have been his eyes' (218). Here, as nowhere else, in the private sea space between the corrupt boundaries of Bay City and Brunnette's boat, Marlowe feels able to confess, and with his hand held by the 'strong, hard, warm and slightly sticky' paw of Red, he feels strong enough to carry out his mission (223), which is, ironically, a final desperate effort to locate the elusive Moose. The masculine search for adventure is equally and also a search for the legitimisation of homosexual desire, as it is only within the totally defeminised context of danger that the homoerotic can find any outlet or articulation.

Consequently it would seem that Marlowe's search throughout *Farewell, My Lovely* is not for Velma or Mrs Grayle, but rather for a legitimate object of desire through which he might satisfy his craving for Moose Malloy. Finding Red Norgaard in the climactic moments of the novel satisfies his longing for one good man, and makes possible the completion of his quest. He has sought throughout for Moose as well as Velma, and in a final confrontation that, structurally, is not so far removed from the classical paradigm, he brings the suspects together. What profoundly differentiates Chandler's finale from those of Philo Vance, or Hercule Poirot, however, is the detective's lack of control over the situation. In a bizarre chemical experiment, Marlowe puts Velma and Moose in the same room and waits to see what happens. That this room is also his bedroom, in which he had been dreaming of Red before wakening to the vision of Moose standing over him, only adds to the confusion. Marlowe, the detective, who should be detached, has become voyeuristically over-committed to the conclusion of the Moose/Velma narrative. Unwilling to let the law take its course, he forces a confrontation – the end of the show – and arranges it to take place in the convenience of his own bedroom. That the story ends in murder is no surprise, as Velma proves herself to be both a typical *femme fatale* and the specific Achilles heel of Moose's otherwise invulnerable masculinity (1940/1949: 245).

It might seem, in conclusion, that Chandler's 'love story' has gone

the way of all hard-boiled narrative. It has mutated into a story that is 'dark and full of blood' (1940/1949: 246). Moose is dead, betrayed again by Velma, and Marlowe has only the memory of his intimacy with Red to set against the crumbling edifice of a corrupt society. Yet Marlowe's narrative is mendacious. Having told Anne Riordan that his story could have no tidy endings or neat conclusions, in the closing pages of the novel he proceeds quite shamelessly with a project of romantic rehabilitation that reconstructs the narrative as a love story. In a phoenix-like feat of mythologising, the story is even provided with a female lead but, as she is dead, such an elevation of the feminine might, for once, be regarded as safe:

I'm not saying she was a saint or even a half-way nice girl. Not ever. She wouldn't kill herself until she was cornered. But what she did and the way she did it, kept her from coming back here for trial. Think that over. And who would that trial hurt most? Who would least be able to bear it? And win, lose or draw, who would pay the biggest price for the show? An old man who had loved not wisely, but too well' (Chandler, 1940/1949: 253)

So is this a 'tragedy with a happy ending'? Chandler's description of the detective story is an attractive one, but it is also misleading. For all Marlowe's mythologising, the end of *Farewell, My Lovely* is happy only in so far as it evokes the 'romantic dream on which love feeds'. Nonetheless, in the quests of Moose and Marlowe, Chandler ultimately disproves his own assertion that the love story and the detective story cannot co-exist. Rather his fictions reveal the co-habitation of these two genres, which hard-boiled narrative would traditionally most strenuously seek to deny. Caught between the necessity of masculine self-fashioning and the painful constraints within which that creation must be bound, Chandler's hyperbolic novels end up producing the illegitimate and the taboo. Marlowe's world of masculine excess thus becomes an environment within which the homosocial is celebrated and a legitimised homoeroticism emerges as the love which makes up in body for what it may not speak in name.

THE (VERY) LONG GOOD-BYE: A CASE OF DÉJÀ VU?

Calvin Thomas reminds us that in 'the long-standing patriarchal ideology in which embodiment and femininity are equated . . . male bodies do not matter' (1996: 15). Yet while writing in a cultural

climate within which the only visible bodies were those of women, Chandler paid remarkable attention to the details of the male body and, in so doing, he risked destabilising the patriarchal masculine ideal. As Thomas observes:

[M]asculinity does not exist outside representation, yet in the process of self-representation it risks losing itself, changing itself, seeping out through its own fissures and cracks. (Thomas, 1996: 16)

Masculinity must be constituted through repeated reinscription and, as Judith Butler suggests, it is this 'citationality' that underpins its authority:

If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that 'success' is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices*. (Butler, 1993: 226-7)

But, 'reiterations are never simply replicas of the same' (Butler, 1993: 226). Reinscription is an inexact science, and each repetition also becomes a multiplication that transgresses the boundaries of the patriarchal template. With each necessary reiteration comes the danger of another inscription: the possibility that the utterance which should have described the self has instead depicted the other. With each new citation men risk seeing the reflection not of masculine self-containment, but of feminine excess. And it is this excess that brings me in conclusion to *The Long Good-Bye*.

Although not the last novel to feature Philip Marlowe, *The Long Good-Bye* is customarily cited as Chandler's swan song, his last great reiteration of the tough-talking hard-boiled ideal.¹⁵ On every level this novel struggles to attain Thomas's 'immaculate self-construction', replaying the tropes of tough talk, stubborn silence and self-imposed isolation. But *The Long Good-Bye* does not only replicate the formula of Chandler's earlier fiction; it also self-consciously reiterates the content, reworking previous plot devices to emphasise the complex process of becoming that produces the masculine and its fictions. In its evocation of both *The Big Sleep* and *Farewell, My Lovely*, *The Long Good-Bye* becomes an unstable, multilayered and

excessive reinscription of an ideal it seems increasingly unable to sustain.

The Long Good-Bye, like *Farewell, My Lovely*, opens with Marlowe's attraction to a man. Although Terry Lennox bears little physical resemblance to the monumental masculinity of Moose Malloy, the lasting fascination of his impact on Marlowe is remarkably similar. The most significant difference between the two opening scenarios would seem to be that, in the later novel, the roles have been reversed. This time it is Marlowe who takes on the role of the big man, picking up the vulnerable Lennox from the gutter of his drunken excess. Here is a prime opportunity for romantic masculine self-definition through the benevolent protection of a weaker, feminised other. The romance, however, is short-lived. After a period of benign companionship, Lennox, like Moose, goes underground. The report of Lennox's death establishes the grounds for Marlowe's quest. This time he will not pursue the literal or semiotic body of the missing man, but rather will seek to restore the symbolic body, that is, Terry Lennox's 'good name'. Through his quest to restore Terry's reputation, Marlowe replaces the reality of the man he knew with an ideal every bit as romantic as his mythologising of Moose Malloy.

Terry Lennox thus becomes an icon of doomed masculinity. Marlowe reads his actions as a noble self-sacrifice to set against the baseness of the world he left behind. The evidence of this residual corruption is, as usual, most clearly evident within the characters of the novel's women, the sexually voracious Sylvia Lennox and the murderous Eileen Wade. Masculinity betrayed is a central trope of Chandler's earlier fiction. However, in *The Big Sleep* and *Farewell, My Lovely* the authentically dead do not run the risk of falling off the pedestals erected by the worshipful Marlowe. Neither the reader nor Marlowe ever has the pleasure of encountering Rusty Regan's Irish charm. He is long dead before the narrative gets under way, shot by Carmen Sternwood, the woman he had scorned, and this textual absence makes his idealisation all the easier. Much the same could be said of Moose Malloy – a man unlikely to improve upon further acquaintance. Fortunately Little Velma shoots him before Marlowe's ardour can cool. Consequently, in returning to life, Terry Lennox comes to provide a masculine illustration of what women have long recognised: the impossibility of living up to an ideal. His bodily self is rejected as being uncomfortably in excess of the tidy obituary which Marlowe had written for him:

I'm not judging you. I never did. It's just that you're not here any more. You're long gone. You've got nice clothes and perfume and you're as elegant as a fifty-dollar whore. (Chandler, 1953/1959: 320)

Lennox has mutated from masculinity betrayed into that which betrays masculinity. His bodily return has feminised him, while also teaching him that '[a]n act is all there is' (1953/1959: 320). Marlowe, in contrast, still clings to a belief in a fixed ideal of masculinity: the legendary big man. But big men are getting harder to find – a fact that accounts both for the grimmer tone of *The Long Good-Bye*, and for Marlowe's bizarre behaviour in the case of Roger Wade, the novel's other flawed icon of masculinity.¹⁶

Marlowe's relationship to the author Roger Wade could justifiably be construed as sinister. Wade is a troubled man who cannot finish his latest novel. Part of his problem stems from the psychotic tendencies of his wife, but there is more to his anxieties than the familiar female betrayal. Marlowe is recruited by Wade's wife and his publisher to oversee the reluctant author, but rather than fully accepting or rejecting this commission, he comes instead to haunt the Wade household as an invited but seldom welcome guest. Marlowe comes when he is called, but is always less tractable on arrival, refusing to take action and hovering like a shabby nemesis over the drunken decline of Wade. Rather than helping Wade, Marlowe seems to be testing him, waiting for a sign of masculine greatness – for proof that Wade is, in fact, a real big man. Unfortunately for Wade, Marlowe's criteria of greatness are harsh – and while Eileen Wade and Howard Spencer think he is safeguarding the production of another bestselling novel, Marlowe is instead protecting Wade's right to die. In refusing to complete a debased cultural product and in drinking himself into an easily killable stupor, Wade rejects the corrupted world of his wife's crimes and his publisher's greed, and achieves, in Marlowe's eyes, some dubious form of redemption. And indeed, in death he approximates the masculine ideal sadly tarnished by Terry Lennox's inappropriate return to life.

It is in the eventual ignominious death of the author that Wade comes to act as Chandler's most self-conscious depiction of the pattern which underpins so much of his fiction, namely the struggle for and ultimate impossibility of 'immaculate self-creation'. Wade's role as a writer is crucial here. Each novel that he produces brings him wealth and the power associated therewith, so that his writing

could be said to constitute his masculine identity. However, this inscription is an unstable one, for the massive 'body' of Wade's work is the sordid and debased bulk of genre fiction. Wade is a writer of historical romances, and each novel thus becomes a problematic reinscription of the very 'feminine' it seeks to deny. The very thing that makes Roger Wade also repulses him:

Writers. Everything has to be like something else. My head is as fluffy as whipped cream but not as sweet. More similes. I could vomit just thinking about the lousy racket. I could vomit anyway. I probably will. (Chandler, 1953/1959: 172)

And in Marlowe's eyes Wade is right to be repulsed. Although he likes the man, he loathes the work which produces him: 'I looked at one of his books once. I thought it was tripe' (1953/1959: 79). *The Long Good-Bye*, like all of Chandler's novels, adheres rigorously to the traditional binary divide between a superior, elitist, masculine art, and a feminised popular culture – a paradox that perhaps contributes to the aggressive assertion of toughness within the hard-boiled genre. In Roger Wade, however, masculinity's relation to the abject is made painfully clear. With each new novel, Wade creates and constitutes his masculinity through a very public production of the feminine. And with the assumption that he will produce another novel comes the knowledge that the bodily 'feminine' traces expelled in the process of self-creation can never be wholly eradicated. Writing, which seems on the surface to be the most certain guarantee of the masculine, is also that which most completely ensures its provisional status.

Thus the trajectory of Chandler's own genre fiction also becomes increasingly bleak. No matter how many times he reiterates the prescriptions of masculine conformity, he cannot escape the traces of both illegitimate desire and the abjected body. That which has been repulsed remains an omnipresent threat to the boundaries of masculine self-definition, and, in hard-boiled detection as in the classical clue-puzzle, the excessive traces of those corporeal 'realities' that the narrative would seek to deny come stubbornly and persistently home to roost.

NOTES

1. In the opening pages of *The Big Sleep* Marlowe tells us what he is wearing, describes what he sees around him at the Sternwood mansion, flirts with and is kissed by a passing psychotic

- female, and gives a very brief CV consisting only of his age (33) and a tendency to insubordination (1939/1948: 15).
2. Christianson makes a useful distinction between the wisecrack and the hard-boiled conceit, defining the first as a public, specifically dialogic, marker of toughness, and the second as a descriptive mode emerging from the private register of the first-person narrative voice (1989: 156). Stephen Knight, however, sees the distinction as one between private superiority and public insecurity. He compares the 'comfortable control' of Marlowe's private reverie with the frequently immature and aggressive nature of his public utterances (1980: 143–4).
 3. The Production Code of 1930 was Hollywood's attempt to evade external censorship through self-regulation, and pre-eminent among its governing principles was the demand that 'no picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it' (Maltby and Craven, 1995: 41–2, 340–3).
 4. Marlowe suffers terribly from a literary form of *coitus interruptus*. In *Farewell, My Lovely* his embrace of the holy Grayle is interrupted by her husband (1940/1949: 119), in *The Long Good-Bye* the 'spell' of Eileen Wade is broken by the 'saving' intervention of the houseboy Candy (1953/1959: 180) and, most dramatically, in *Playback*, his first close encounter with Betty Mayfield ends in the oblivion of unconsciousness after a crack on the head with a whisky bottle (1958/1961: 33–4).
 5. It is worth noticing that Marlowe's quest is also driven by a sentimental urge to revenge the death of Harry Jones, a little guy whose courage elevates him to big man status.
 6. Eve Sedgwick also challenges liberal scholarship's determination to evade the issue of sexuality at all cost. In *Epistemology of the Closet* she provides a witty list of eight popular gay dismissals, of which the most suitable in this case are numbers 6 and 7:
 6. The author under discussion is certified or rumored to have had an attachment to someone of the other sex – so their feelings about people of their own sex must have been completely meaningless. Or (under a perhaps somewhat different rule of admissible evidence)
 7. There is no actual proof of homosexuality, such as sperm taken from the body of another man or a nude photograph with another woman – so the author may be assumed to have been ardently and exclusively heterosexual. (Sedgwick, 1990/1994: 52–3)
 7. Although the categories are far from self-contained, some distinction needs to be drawn between the homosocial, the homoerotic and the homosexual. Throughout the chapter I will be using the homosocial to refer to a social order that privileges the bonds between men, whether that be in terms of the economics of exchange (of which women are frequently the object), the inheritance structures and pressures of patriarchy, or the more positive categories of friendship. The homoerotic refers to anything that might connote the possibility of desire between men, specifically the depiction of male characters in explicitly or implicitly sensual modes. The term 'homosexual', by contrast, is reserved for actual acts of physical intimacy between men.
 8. The semiotic might be seen as a disruption of narrative order, a textual excess that disrupts symbolic functioning and encodes a yearning for the ideal dyadic unity of the pre-Oedipal phase. Kristeva's concept is discussed in chapter 1, and a useful account is also provided by Pam Morris (1993: 144–8).
 9. The tendency of Marlowe's ideals to metamorphose into monsters can also be seen as a byproduct of patriarchal pressure. Discussing Victor Frankenstein's attempt to assert his heroic potential through the creation of a larger-than-life new man, Berthold Schoene-Harwood concludes that 'the masculine ideal has turned into an inexorable imperative perpetuating itself beyond all human control' (2000: 20).
 10. Although Bataille's focus falls exclusively upon a hierarchical conception of heterosexual relations, his formulations nonetheless seem singularly appropriate for the homoerotic fantasies of Chandler's detective.
 11. Examples include Dorothy L. Sayers's *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937) and Margery Allingham's *Traitor's Purse* (1941). In Sayers's novel the threat of war is one of many pressures which expose Wimsey's vulnerability and drive him to find security in the arms of his new wife Harriet Vane. Marriage becomes a safe haven from an increasingly hostile symbolic order (Plain, 1996). Allingham's novel, meanwhile, offers a more extreme reinscription of the pre-Oedipal. When Albert Campion loses his memory, he becomes totally dependent upon his fiancée Amanda Fitton, who appears to him as a strange and wonderful mother figure,

- nurturing him in his hour of need and giving him the strength to save Britain from national calamity (Allingham, 1941/1954: 19, 52).
12. Examples abound, but among the most famous would be Melville's *Moby Dick*, Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and almost anything by Ernest Hemingway.
 13. This, then, is the first appearance of the violet eyes of my title. Their value is twice reiterated over the following pages, most significantly when Marlowe comments, 'I told him a great deal more than I intended to. It must have been his eyes' (1940/1949: 218). However, violet eyes prove rather less trustworthy when part of the female body, as Marlowe discovers to his cost in *The Long Good-Bye* (1953/1959: 81, 87). While Red's eyes act as an index of his inner worth, the devastatingly gorgeous Eileen Wade proves, once again, that female beauty is only skin-deep.
 14. This form of homosociality is a frequent byproduct not only of war, but also of prison experiences. In both cases the absence of a legitimate object of desire in the shape of a woman is accompanied by levels of jeopardy and dislocation strong enough to break down taboos regarding same-sex intimacy. However, the similarities end here as structures of homosexuality within prison environments are more frequently connected to the replication of a series of patriarchal power relations, in which the possession of a boy might be equated to the possession of a woman. Bill James's novel *Halo Parade* (1987) effectively illustrates this dynamic through the relationship between an undercover policeman and a crime boss who 'went queer inside' (1987: 360). In a chilling reinscription of heterosexual power relations, the policeman's downfall comes about not through his exposure as a cop, but through his exposure as 'adulterously' heterosexual (391–6).
 15. Chandler's final completed novel, *Playback* (1958), has few admirers. It is scarcely more than a long short story and lacks most of the corporeal and epistemological complexity that marked the earlier fictions. Its cruder outline can perhaps best be summarised in the fact that not only does Marlowe get more sex than usual, but also that it is described in comparatively graphic and clichéd detail (1958/1961: 77).
 16. Marlowe is at times truly obnoxious in *The Long Good-Bye*. '[S]cowling at nothing' he picks a fight with a stranger in a bar (1953/1959: 83–4) and throughout indulges in an excessive amount of hard-man posturing (35, 65, 115). He is also notably wearier than in earlier adventures (181) and seems to have lost whatever taste he once had for the business: '[s]omething inside me had gone sour' (186). Where once his survival had an edge of optimism, he now seems only to be going through the motions, doggedly persisting in the expectation of no return.